

The Conservation Reserve Program has helped stabilize the population of one grassland species.

Henslow's Sparrow

Populations of most species of grassland birds are declining, and among grassland birds Henslow's sparrows (*Ammodramus henslowii*) are exhibiting the steepest declines. These population declines, along with a small overall population size, have led to high conservation concern. Habitat loss is the most likely cause of recent Henslow's sparrow population declines, although its preference for undisturbed grasslands also may limit its breeding distribution.

One encouraging habitat program for Henslow's sparrows has been the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), where agricultural lands are removed from production and planted to undisturbed grass cover. Surveys of breeding birds within CRP fields have shown them to be particularly attractive to Henslow's sparrows. There is strong evidence that the long-term decline of this species has



(Photo courtesy Kanae Hirabayashi.)

reversed and the population has stabilized in Illinois—resulting in the recent status upgrade from endangered to threatened status.



—**Jim Herkert**, Director of Science for The Nature Conservancy of Illinois

As these birds of prey rebound from near extinction, conservationists celebrate a glimmer of good news.

Raptor Recovery Trifecta



(Photo courtesy Carol Freeman.)

Birds of prey are majestic creatures, but bioaccumulation—the concentrating of poisons from the environment into their bodies—makes their position atop the food chain precarious. In the mid-20th century, we nearly lost the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) and peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) because of the pesticide DDT.

After DDT was banned, populations rebounded slowly at first. In many areas, people helped out by “hacking,” releasing young birds into unoccupied areas where they learn to fly, and eventually return to nest. Peregrine falcons nest in Chicago and many cities, thanks to suc-

cessful hacking efforts. Bald eagles have made an amazing comeback, with nearly 100 active nests being found along Illinois' rivers and impoundments, and thousands visiting in winter.

Of the three birds, the osprey remains the rarest in Illinois. But, biologists are optimistic for the future: populations are robust in surrounding states, platforms have drawn nesting ospreys to Carlyle Lake, and dozens more nesting platforms are going up statewide.



—**Jeff Walk**, Research Scientist, Illinois Natural History Survey